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Amy Marga, Karl Barth's Dialogue with Catholicism in Göttingen and Münster: Its Significance for his Doctrine of God

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Amy Marga, *Karl Barth's Dialogue with Catholicism in Göttingen and Münster: Its Significance for His Doctrine of God* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, Vol. 149), Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2010, viii + 199 pp., £79.00 (ISBN 9783161501487).

The 1920s were the crucial period for Barth's engagement with Roman Catholicism. This study makes use of his Göttingen dogmatic lectures and unpublished Münster lectures, alongside other archival material, to demonstrate how his encounter with Catholic theology helped him clarify and deepen his own theology. Significantly, it thereby sheds new light on Barth's evolving usage of the *analogia entis*, showing how he shifted his understanding and use of this idea rather than, as is often claimed, refuting it with a simple 'Nein!'

Marga continually returns to the striking impression made on Barth by Catholicism's sense of the *Gegenständlichkeit* of God—God's objective and concrete presence—preserved in the mass and in the simple, enduring existence of the Church as institution, as well as in Thomist theology. For this reason if no other, Barth viewed Catholicism in the 1920s as a credible alternative to the Protestant faith. For example, Karl Adam's 'turn to objectivity' in regarding the visible Church as the body of Christ was an important attempt to counter Weimar decadence and social privatization with a doctrine of God's concrete presence to humanity in a collective, mystical context.

Particularly important was Barth's dialogue with popular Jesuit theologian Erich Przywara. The Jesuits had been among the very few Catholics to oppose the war, and the journal *Stimmen der Zeit*, of which Przywara was editor, was a key mouthpiece for criticism of the political establishment. Barth and Przywara converged on several points: the order of incarnation presupposes the order of creation; there is a God-human relationship distinct from the hypostatic union of divinity with humanity in Jesus Christ; the grace of reconciliation exists peaceably with the sinful reality of creaturely existence.

Pryzwara, however, was a staunch proponent of the metaphysical *analogia entis* doctrine that Barth would come to reject. But Barth's mature view of human participation in God's act and being can be read, with Gottlieb Söhngen, as demanding not the rejection of an analogy of being but rather as folding this analogy into the order of grace and reconciliation. 'In other words,' Marga argues, 'the *analogia fidei* can include the *analogia entis* in itself.' (52) This inclusion is effected by God entering into the structures of creaturely reality, becoming present to humanity in Christ as both subject (in divine action in the Logos) and object (as the human being on which dogmatic theology reflects), as suggested by the classic anhypostatic-enhypostatic formula. This fusion grounds what should rightly be seen as an abiding *analogia entis*, on which Barth builds his Spirit-led conception of God's objective presence to creation in God's own speaking, scripture and proclamation. This final move obviously satisfied Barth's thoroughly actualistic conception of divine presence, in a superior mode to what he regarded as the static structures and sacraments of Catholicism supported by the incarnationism of his Lutheran colleague Erik Peterson, which was in danger of restricting divine freedom. For Barth therefore, dialectics does not exclude analogy, but provides its true context.

In the Münster lectures, this analogy is founded on reconciliation. Barth objected to the notion that the unreconciled human mind can come to know God, but if the doctrine of creation is simultaneous with that of reconciliation, such knowledge becomes possible. Indeed, if it were not, God would effectively be divided. Strikingly, creation here occupies the place that election would come to assume in Barth's later thought, when his Reformed sensibility eventually won over. Only a strong doctrine of election—God's free, sovereign will for humanity—could ground human knowledge of God.

From a Catholic perspective, one of the refreshing aspects of this study is its engagement with German—as opposed to French—interwar Catholic theology. A key

question it does not answer, however, is what Barth's view of *nouvelle théologie* Catholicism might have been. Despite observing part of the Second Vatican Council, Barth's view of Catholicism remained rooted in the 1920s, resourced by the First Vatican Council, Denzinger's *Enchiridion* and Thomism, the latter mediated by Peterson.

In some respects, German and French interwar Catholicism had similar backgrounds, with Bismarck's 1870s *Kulturkampf* against Catholicism paralleling the laicisation of the French education system under the Ferry laws of the 1880s. Moreover, Catholics were able in both states to demonstrate their patriotic credentials through service in the Great War and thereby achieve a measure of social and political rehabilitation. But involvement in a war of aggression that ended in humiliating defeat and led to economic turmoil and ultimately Nazism impacted very differently on a Church than participation in a defensive war that achieved liberation and territorial expansion. For the French, who had been fighting secularism for several decades, integrist notions of the God–nature relation helped correct an excessively polarised view of this relationship, whereas German religion, which under the Kaiser had suffered the opposite problem of allowing itself to become the worshipping arm of a militarised dictatorship, required a strong dose of dialectics.

Ultimately, the mature Barth and Catholicism, as expressed in *nouvelle théologie*, can be seen as amenable to greater resolution than even Marga's excellent study suggests, and not only because they both gave the theologies of their respective Churches what each needed. As early as 1908, Pierre Rousselot had employed the 'eyes of faith' imagery to argue that divine objectivity in the Church was not self-grounding but dependent on a prior interior assent to the divine. Moreover, building on Blondel's philosophy of action, which itself appropriated the Thomistic view of God as pure act, *nouvelle théologie* prosecuted a sustained attack on the doctrine of the univocity of being, which tended to domesticate God

and knowledge about God, promoting in its place the *supernatural* thesis that the whole of nature was related to divine action and sustained by that action.

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